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A Walk Down
Bond Street

A WALK DOWN BOND STREET

THE
CENTENARY SOUVENIR
OF
THE HOUSE OF
ASHTON AND MITCHELL
1820 - 1920

BY
AUSTIN BRERETON

Seventeen Illustrations



LONDON :
21, YORK BUILDINGS, ADELPHI, W.C. 2

Lord Daberly : But why don't you stand up ?
The boy rolls about like a porpus in a storm.

Dick Dowlas : That's the fashion, father ; that's
modern ease. A young fellow is nothing now,
without the Bond Street roll, a toothpick between his
teeth, and his knuckles cramm'd into his coat-pocket.
Then away you go, lounging lazily along!—GEORGE
COLMAN the Younger's *The Heir-at-Law*, 1797.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

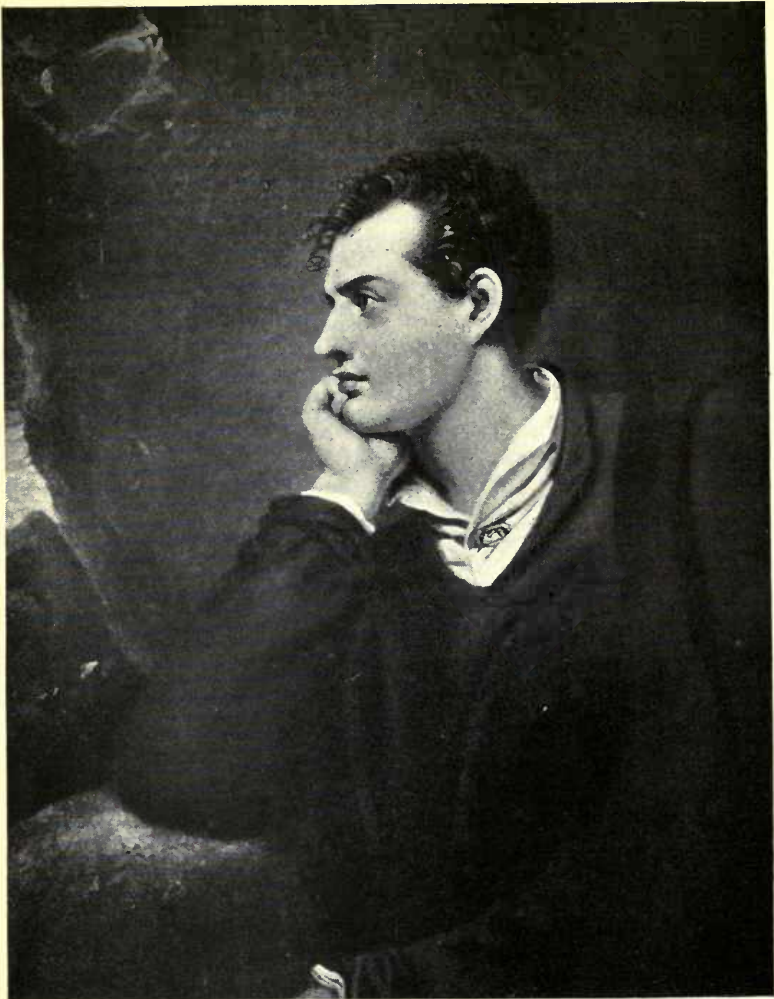
Little did Mr. George Ashton imagine, when he asked me to write a pamphlet in connection with the re-organization of 33, Old Bond Street, that he was about to confer upon me a great pleasure. Yet this is the fortunate result of a friendship which dates from 1881. My own knowledge of London has been vastly increased, so that I may now claim to an acquaintance with Bond Street which approaches my intimacy with the Adelphi. More important still, I have been enabled to add to the literature on London a volume which puts upon record the story of one of the most interesting streets in the West-end, a street which, for two hundred years, has been the recognized thoroughfare of fashion. In the general view, Bond Street is synonymous with perfumes and laces and "sweet pretty faces," with millinery and mantles, with silver and gold and precious stones, with seats for the opera and stalls for the play. It has, however, a literature and a history of its own. John Evelyn saw it in the beginning, it was early a residence of the "nobility and gentry," the lucky Lavinia Fenton and the unfortunate Countess of Macclesfield lived in it, Gibbon, the historian, passed "many solitary evenings" in it, the author of "Tristram Shandy" died in it. Here, Boswell entertained Dr. Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and David Garrick at dinner on the memorable occasion when Goldsmith "strutted about" in his new clothes; here Sir Walter Scott saw Lord Byron for the last time; here Nelson lay in great suffering. In a later day, Lady Blessington and "the last of the dandies" came to Bond Street. Queen Victoria visited the Royal library, otherwise the concert and ticket agency in which this book has its origin. The greatest of the actors of the Victorian era lived and moved and had his being in Bond Street. In other days, the libraries really were such; not only did they lend books; they printed and published them. In "A Walk Down Bond Street," Ashton and Mitchell return to the original purpose of the Bond Street libraries.

In the production of this book, I have been given a free hand. If it contains any errors of omission, the fault must be laid at my door. My researches have been thorough; and, as is usual in dealing with an historical subject, much matter has been discarded as being superfluous. I have endeavoured to make a narrative out of my "Walk Down Bond Street"—a thoroughfare which, for its length, 580 feet, has one of the most interesting histories of any part of London. With few exceptions, I have confined myself to the oldest portion of the street. The beginning of New Bond Street dates from 1721, but the story of the extension of the original street does not come into this book. As showing how a subject may be expanded, and relevantly so, I may observe that in the admirable edition of "London Past and Present," based upon Peter Cunningham's "Handbook of London," by the late Henry B. Wheatley, Old Bond Street occupies one page. More space is devoted to it in Mr. Wheatley's "Round about Piccadilly and Pall Mall," but, even there, the account is abridged to within three brief pages. I am, therefore, indebted to the house of Ashton and Mitchell inasmuch as the heads thereof have not restricted me in any respect whatever in the writing of this souvenir of their centenary.

A. B.

May, 1920.

HER MAJESTY
QUEEN VICTORIA
accompanied by
H.R.H. THE PRINCESS BEATRICE
attended by
LADY CHURCHILL
LORD BRIDPORT
and
COLONEL PONSONBY
HONORED THIS ESTABLISHMENT
with her presence
APRIL 9 1869



From the painting by Richard Westall

LORD BYRON

A Walk Down Bond Street



BEFORE we join the "Bond Street loungers," who were notorious two centuries ago, we must step back for a brief space into the days of Charles the First and his son, the "Merry Monarch." Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, who did such splendid service for the two Kings and for his country, was allowed to die, an old and worn man, in exile. But for him, perchance, there had been no Bond Street. Let us, therefore, see how he comes into this history. The loyal friend and minister of King Charles in his most troublous times, he followed Prince Charles to Scilly and Jersey, and ultimately remained with him at the Hague and returned with him to England. As Secretary of State, in 1651, he was the chief adviser to Charles II. Seven years later, he became Lord Chancellor, a post which he retained until fate and his enemies drove him from the land of his birth. He was created Baron Hyde in 1660, Earl of Clarendon in 1661. On June 13th, 1664, the King made him a grant of land for his town house. His eight acres of ground were surrounded by a wall and the building of Clarendon House began in August. Clarendon House stood on the north side of Piccadilly, looking down upon St. James's Palace. The stones used in the building of the house were originally intended for use in the restoration of old St. Paul's. The populace were much incensed by the misuse to which they were put. Clarendon was suspected, but unjustly, by the people for his share in the Dutch war and for the sale, which he did not initiate, but carried out, of Dunkirk. Consequently, Clarendon House was called, by the mob, Dunkirk House, Holland House, and Tangier Hall.

From the Diary of that "honest and God-fearing" man, John Evelyn, we get a vivid picture of Clarendon house, of its speedy sale, and of the beginning of Bond Street. On October 5th, 1664, Evelyn dined at Worcester House, in the Strand, then the residence of the Earl. **The Great Earl of Clarendon** "After dinner my Lord Chancellor and his lady carried me in their coach to see their palace building at the upper end of St. James's Streete, and to project the garden. In the evening, I presented to him my book on Architecture, as before I had done to his Mat^y. and y^e Queene Mother." On November 28th, 1666, Evelyn "went to see Clarendon House, now almost finish'd, a goodly pile to see, but had many defects as to y^e architecture, yet plac'd most gracefully." That other great diarist, Samuel Pepys, was mightily impressed by Clarendon House. On February 14th, 1665-1666, he "took Mr. Hill to my Lord Chancellor's new house, that is building, and went, with trouble, up to the top of it, and there's the noblest prospect that ever I saw in my life, Greenwich being nothing to it; and in everything it is a beautiful house, and most strongly built in every respect; and as if, as it hath, it had the Chancellor for its master." Alas for the "weakness and vanity" which Clarendon admits, in his autobiography, drew down upon him "the gust of envy." Overthrown by court intrigues and the hostility of parliament, Clarendon was dismissed from office in 1667, impeached, and

banished. He spent the last six years of his life in tranquillity. From Rouen, in 1674, he sent a most pathetic appeal to Charles for permission to "die in his own country." His piteous entreaty was refused, and at Rouen he died, on December the 9th. His remains were brought to England and laid in his family vault in Westminster Abbey, but without a stone or name to mark the spot, at the foot of the steps to Henry VII.'s chapel. It was not until 1867 that the name was added.

From the virtuous Lord Chancellor we pass to a lesser light, Sir Thomas Bond. Clarendon House was sold, in 1675, to Christopher Monk, the second and last Duke of Albemarle, whose extravagance was so great that he had to part with the property very soon after he had purchased it. This famous house, which had helped in the downfall of its builder, was destroyed, and Bond Street came into being. "After dinner," on the 18th of September, 1683, Evelyn "walked to survey the sad demolition of Clarendon House, that costly



EDWARD GIBBON

and only sumptuous palace of the late Lord Chancellor Hyde, where I have often been so cheerful with him, and sometimes so sad." The ill-luck of Clarendon House seems to have descended to its purchaser. In a note, Evelyn says: "Clarendon House, built by Mr. Prat; since quite demolished by Sir Thomas Bond, &c., who purchased it to build a street of tenements to his undoing." Evelyn was well acquainted with Bond and therefore likely to know all about his "undoing." In 1676, he "went to see S^r Tho. Bond's new and fine house by Peckham." Again, in 1681, he "went to see S^r Tho. Bond's fine house and garden at Peckham." Very little is known of Sir Thomas, who has been dubbed "the first of the company promoters." Bond was a Roman Catholic; he was comptroller

of the household to the Queen-Mother (Henrietta Maria); and he was created a baronet in 1658, by Charles II., to whom, whilst in exile, he had advanced large sums of money. He died, in 1685, soon after the purchase of Clarendon House, and was buried at Camberwell, in which parish his "fine house" was situated.

Little did the worthy citizen imagine that he was to be handed down to fame by means of the most select and fashionable of all the shopping streets in London. Although Bond Street was not built until 1686, it soon achieved that celebrity which has clung to it through the centuries. In 1708, it was described in Hatton's *New View of London* as "a fine new street, mostly inhabited by nobility and gentry, between Portugal Street and the Fields." At that time, and for some sixteen years later, Lords Abington, Anglesey, and Coningsby were residents of Bond Street. The "Bond Street loungers," already alluded to, were noted as early as June 1st, 1717, in the

The
Nobility
and Gentry

Weekly Journal.* Some of the most celebrated people of the world of London have lived and moved and had their being in Bond Street. The first Duke of St. Albans (the son of Charles II. and Nell Gwynne) died here in 1726. In the *London Gazette*, in 1727, the following advertisement appeared: "To be let or sold. . . . A house in Old Bond Street, Piccadilly, of Four Rooms or a Floor with Closets, good Cellar, and all other conveniences. Being the house in which the late Duke of St. Albans lived." Charles Jenkinson (1727-1808), the statesman, the first Earl of Liverpool, who led the "King's friends" after the retirement of Bute, lived in Bond Street in 1756. The elder William Pitt (1708-1778), the first Earl of Chatham, dated from here in 1766, the year in which he accepted the earldom and took the sinecure office of Lord Privy Seal. George Selwyn lodged here in 1751.

With but two exceptions, the celebrated residents of Bond Street have all been men. In 1730, Lavinia Fenton, afterwards the Duchess of Bolton, then

The First and her triumph on the
Polly stage, came to live in Bond
Peachum Street, occupying the house

"in which the Lady Elizabeth Wentworth lived." Lavinia Fenton was the original Polly Peachum in "The Beggar's Opera," which was produced at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, in 1728, when Lavinia was twenty years of age and her salary fifteen shillings a week. She soon became the talk of the town. Gay, the author, made a small fortune out of it, and Rich, the manager, became opulent. In that same year, Lavinia Fenton appeared as Ophelia. "She was," says a contemporary, "a very accomplished and most agreeable companion; had much wit, strong good sense, and a just taste in polite literature. Her person was agreeable and well made, though I think she could never be called a beauty."



LAURENCE STERNE

The other female celebrity of Bond Street was the Countess of Macclesfield, who was claimed as his mother by Richard Savage, the poet, and Queen Caroline's "volunteer laureate"; here she was besieged by her so-called son. Johnson, in his "Lives of the Poets," tells the story of this unfortunate incident in the life of the unhappy poet who, "disowned at birth by his mother," was "doomed to poverty and obscurity, and launched upon the ocean of life only that he might be swallowed by its quicksands or dashed upon its rocks. . . . Mr. Savage, when he had discovered his birth, had an incessant desire to

* "Could the builders have supposed their labours would have produced a place so extremely fashionable, they might probably have deviated once at least from their usual parsimony, by making the way rather wider; as it is at present, coaches are greatly impeded in the rapidity of their course, but this is a fortunate circumstance for the Bond Street Loungers, who are by this defect granted glimpses of the fashionable and titled fair that pass and re-pass from two till five o'clock."

speak to his mother, who always avoided him in public, and refused him admission into her house. One evening, walking, as it was his custom, in the street that she inhabited, he saw the door of the house by accident open; he entered it, and, finding no person in the passage to hinder him, went upstairs to salute her. She discovered him before he entered the chamber, alarmed the family with the most distressful outcries, and when she had by her screams gathered them about her, ordered them to drive out of the house that villain, who had forced himself in upon her, and endeavoured to murder her. Savage, who had attempted with the most submissive tenderness to soften her rage, hearing her utter so detestable an accusation, thought it prudent to retire, and, I believe, never attempted afterwards to speak to her." In justice to the lady, be it said that Savage himself was the sole authority for the claim that he made as to his birth. He owes his reputation entirely to Johnson, who knew Savage in his own struggling days, and, "moved by pity to partiality, wrote what is, perhaps, the most perfect shorter 'Life' in English literature."



JAMES THOMSON

ludging in the street of this history in 1760. "While coaches were rattling through Bond Street," he says, "I have passed many solitary evenings in my lodgings with my books"—dreaming, may be, of his attachment to Susanne Lurchod (afterwards Madame Necker). An inhabitant of lesser note was Richard West (1716-1742), the poet, the school-friend of Thomas Gray at Eton. He entered the Middle Temple in 1733. But he moved from there to Bond Street. "I lived in the Temple till I was sick of it," he wrote to Gray, "it is certain at least that I can study the law here as well as I could there." Archibald Bower, the historian and religious turncoat, died in Bond Street, in 1766.

Among the lesser notabilities of the thoroughfare in the eighteenth century was Sir Luke Schaub, the diplomatist, a Swiss by birth. He held many important posts on the Continent. In 1718, he was the English agent at Madrid; from 1721-24, he was our ambassador at Paris. Thanks to the machinations of Lord Townshend, he was superseded in the latter post by

The "inherent improbabilities and proved falsehoods" of Savage's story were conclusively set at rest by the late Moy Thomas, in 1858. The Countess—who was Anne, daughter of Sir Richard Mason, and wife of Charles Gerard, the second Earl of Macclesfield—died in her house in Bond Street on October 11th, 1753, surviving by ten years, the man who had caused her so much misery.

Apart from the first Polly Peachum and the unfortunate Countess, the story of Bond Street belongs to men only. One of its most illustrious inhabitants was the historian, Edward Gibbon, who, born in 1737, had passed five years in Switzerland before he returned to London. Here, alas, he found "crowds without company, and dissipation without pleasure." He was

**A
Famous
Historian**

Horatio Walpole, the first Baron Walpole, who was so much satirised for the coarseness of his speech and manners. Sir Luke lived in Bond Street in 1746. Another minor celebrity of the fashionable street was Thomas Hervey, the second son of the first Earl of Bristol. The Hon. Thomas derives his fame from Dr. Johnson, who remonstrated with him for his ill-usage of his wife. This eccentric person wrote several crazy pamphlets, including "An answer to a letter he received from Dr. Samuel Johnson to dissuade him from parting with his supposed (second) wife," in 1763, when he was living in Bond Street.

Laurence Sterne did not live much in London. His chief association with the metropolis was in his later days, and, curiously enough, it was in London, and in Bond Street, that he died. When he did come

The Author of "Tristram Shandy" to London, he enjoyed much popularity. In 1760, he was lodging in Pall Mall, and, according to Dr. Johnson, had engagements for every day and night for three months ahead.

He died of pleurisy, on the 18th of March, 1768, in lodgings at

No. 41, Old Bond Street, "over the silk-bag shop," at the age of fifty-five. His last moments are described by John Macdonald, a gentleman's servant, who became known as Beau Macdonald, in his "Travels in Various Parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa," published in 1790. "About this time, Mr. Sterne, the celebrated author, was taken ill at the silk-bag shop in Old Bond Street. 'John,' said my master, 'go and enquire how Mr. Sterne is to-day.' I went to Mr. Sterne's lodgings; the mistress opened the door; I enquired how he did. She told me to go up to the nurse. I went into the room, and he was just a-dying. I waited ten minutes; but in five he said, 'Now it is come!' He put up his hand as if to stop a blow, and died in a minute."



JAMES THOMSON

Another literary inhabitant of Bond Street was James Thomson, "the poet of the seasons." Thomson, who came to London in 1725, when he was twenty-five years old, lived at first in humble lodgings at

The "Poet of the Seasons" Charing Cross, and, when he was writing portions of "Summer," in Little Tower Street, Eastcheap. In later years, when his circumstances were comparatively affluent, he came to the West-End. From Mrs. Piozzi's "Journey through Italy," we learn that "charming Thomson wrote from his lodgings, a milliner's in Bond Street, where he seldom rose early enough to see the sun do more than glisten on the opposite windows of the street." His first play, "Sophonisba," produced in 1729, contained the well-known line, "O Sophonisba, Sophonisba O," which resulted in the parody, "O Jemmy Thomson, Jemmy Thomson O," and the immediate death of the tragedy. Thomson's best work, "The Castle of Indolence," was published in May, 1748. He died, three months later, at Richmond, a favourite resort of his.

The most glorious chapter in the literary annals of Bond Street is that which tells the story of the dinner-party to which Boswell invited Dr.

Johnson, David Garrick, Oliver Goldsmith, and some others.

A Famous Dinner Party In the year 1769, Boswell was lodging in Old Bond Street. On the 16th of October, a small but distinguished company honoured him by their presence.* The giver of the feast was

indeed, was only half the age of Johnson, for he was not yet thirty. He had made the acquaintance of his hero some six years before. In the meantime, he had studied civil law at Utrecht, had visited Berlin and Geneva, had met Voltaire and Rousseau, had made the acquaintance of Wilkes in Italy, and had been introduced to General Paoli in Corsica. His "Account of Corsica," was published in 1768. In the following year—the year of the dinner—his "Essays in Favour of the Brave Corsicans" was issued, and he took part in



SAMUEL JOHNSON

a young man in 1769. Sir Joshua Reynolds, the first president of the Royal Academy (founded in 1768, by George III.), had received the accolade in April of the year of the dinner. He was then, at the age of forty-six, in the zenith of his fame. His Discourses, which he delivered before the students of the Academy, were fourteen in number. They were mostly orations on art and they made it evident that the great painter was also entitled to a high place in the literary ranks of his wonderful epoch.

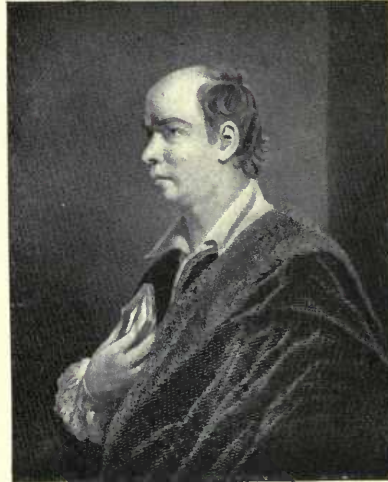
*Boswell's dinner-party in Bond Street took place just two days after the production by Garrick of his Shakespeare pageant at Drury Lane. His commemoration of the dramatist at Stratford-on-Avon began on September 6th, 1769. In this, Boswell was a remarkable figure. As the friend of Paoli, the Corsican patriot, he appeared in a Corsican dress, with a scarlet waistcoat, a stiletto in his belt, and a musket on his back. He wore a cap, with a blue feather, and around it, in letters of gold, the words, "Viva la Liberté." He also wore his Corsican costume in London. The celebration at Stratford was marred by terrible weather. In London, the pageant was given for nearly a hundred nights at Old Drury.

the Shakespearean Jubilee Celebrations which Garrick arranged at Stratford-on-Avon. Johnson, of course, had come into his own long before 1769. So, also, had Garrick, whose supremacy on the English stage had been undisputed for many years. In 1769, he was within seven years of his retirement. He was fifty-one, but full of life and of that vivacity which he derived from his French father and his Irish mother. Goldsmith, ten years Garrick's junior, had been acquainted with Johnson since 1761. Johnson's praise of his "Traveller" did much to enhance Goldsmith's earlier literary reputation. It was Johnson who, in 1766, sold "The Vicar of Wakefield" for Goldsmith, thus saving him from arrest for debt. In 1769, Goldsmith's "History of Rome" was published. The greatest celebrity in his time in English art was still

Johnson, Reynolds, Garrick, and Goldsmith were the bright, particular stars on this joyous evening in Bond Street. The lesser luminaries, however, deserve a note to themselves. Thomas Davies is an interesting figure. In 1769, Johnson being sixty, Davies was fifty-seven. It was through him that Boswell, in 1763, effected his meeting with Johnson. At that time, Davies was a bookseller, who kept a shop in Russell Street, Covent Garden.* A man of some education, he began life as an actor, but was driven from

the stage by a cruel line in Churchill's "Rosciad." Boswell says that Davies "was a man of good understanding and talents, with the advantage of a liberal education. Though somewhat pompous, he was an entertaining companion; and his literary performances have no inconsiderable share of merit. He was a friendly and very hospitable man; both he and his wife (who has been celebrated for her beauty), though upon the stage for many years, maintained an uniform decency of character, and Johnson esteemed them, and lived in as easy an intimacy with them as with any family which he used to visit." The story of Boswell sitting in Davies's back parlour, waiting the approach of the Great Cham, is vastly amusing, but, unfortunately, it has no place in this history. Enough has been said to show that Davies was held in high esteem by Johnson. His "Life of Garrick," published in 1780, is an admirable biography.

The other members of the party were two Irishmen, Arthur Murphy and Isaac Bickerstaffe. The former, who was born in 1727, was an author and an actor. He went on the stage in 1754, and, as a consequence, was refused admission to the Middle Temple three years later, but was admitted at Lincoln's Inn. He edited Fielding's works in 1762, wrote an "Essay on the Life and Genius of Samuel Johnson" in 1792, and a "Life of David Garrick" in 1801. He lived to be nearly eighty, and died respected and in comfort. Less happy, in his old age, was Isaac Bickerstaffe. He was born in Ireland, about 1735, and, at eleven, became page to Lord Chesterfield, the Lord Lieutenant. Between 1756 and 1771 he produced many successful pieces (the plot of which was invariably taken from other plays). "The Maid of the Mill" and "Love in a Village" achieved immense popularity. In 1769, he was a favourite writer and man about town, little dreaming of the disgrace which was to befall him. He is supposed to have died on the continent in or about the year 1821.



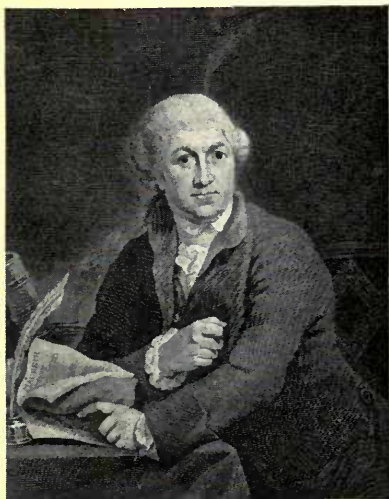
OLIVER GOLDSMITH

*"The very place where I was fortunate enough to be introduced to the illustrious subject of this work, deserves to be particularly marked. I never pass by it without feeling reverence and regret."—Boswell. No. 8, Russell Street still stands. The upper part does not seem to have been altered, but the ground-floor is now an open space used by a wholesale green-grocer.—A. B.

Boswell gives us a lengthy account of this brilliant night in Bond Street. Lengthy though it be, one could have wished that it had been complete.

Naturally, it centres around Johnson, and his side of the Goldsmith's conversation is recorded with particular care. We get an "Bloom-coloured" Goldsmith and his "bloom-coloured" coat. Garrick, we are told, "played round" Johnson "with a fond vivacity, taking

hold of the breasts of his coat, and, looking up in his face with a lively archness, complimented him on the good health which he seemed then to enjoy; while the sage, shaking his head, beheld him with a gentle complacency." Thus this memorable evening began. One of the company not having arrived at the appointed hour, Boswell proposed that he should order dinner to be served, adding "Ought six people to be kept waiting for one?" "Why, yes," answered Johnson, with a delicate humanity, "if the one will suffer more by your sitting down than the six will do by waiting." In



DAVID GARRICK

order "to divert the tedious minutes," Goldsmith "strutted about, bragging of his dress, and I believe was seriously vain of it, for his mind was wonderfully prone to such impressions." So, also, be it remarked, was Boswell himself, for he had recently "strutted about" in Corsican costume, and Forster reminds us that he "was so proud of his ordinary dress that he would show off, to the smallest of printer's devils, his new ruffles and sword." On the very day of the dinner, Goldsmith's tailor had sent home sundry clothes to the author of "The Vicar of Wakefield." Here is an extract from Mr. Filby's ledger, under date October 16th, 1769:

To making a half-dress suit of	£	s.	d.
ratteen, lined with satin	...	12	12 0
To a pair of silkstockingbreeches	2	5	0
To a pair of bloom-coloured ditto	1	4	6

No wonder that Goldsmith was proud of the new clothes which he had donned for the occasion. "Come, come," rejoined Garrick, "You are perhaps the worst-eh, eh!" Goldsmith attempted to interrupt him, but Garrick went on, laughing ironically. "Nay, you will always look like a gentleman, but I am talking of being well or ill *drest*." "Well, let me tell you," replied Goldsmith, "when my tailor brought home my bloom-coloured coat, he said, 'Sir, I have a favour to beg of you. When anybody asks you who made your clothes, be pleased to mention John Filby, at the Harrow, in Water Lane.'"* Johnson: "Why, sir, that was because he knew the strange colour would attract crowds to gaze at it, and thus they might hear of him, and see how well he could make a coat even of so absurd a colour." Mr. Filby deserves the immortality bestowed upon him by the "bloom-coloured" coat. Goldsmith, at his death, was indebted to his tailor in the sum of £79 14s. 0d.

*Water Lane, Fleet Street, was changed to Whitefriars Street, in 1844, at the request of the freeholders of the lane.

After dinner, the conversation turned upon Pope. His characters of men, Johnson said, were admirably drawn, those of women not so well. He repeated to the company, "in his forcible, melodious manner," the concluding lines of the "Dunciad" :—

"Lo! thy dread empire, Chaos, is restored!
Light dies before thy unrevealed word;
Thy hand, great Anarch, lets the curtain fall,
And universal darkness buries all!"

While he was talking loudly in praise of those lines, "one of the company," who is believed to have been Boswell, the host, ventured to say, "Too fine for such a poem: a poem on what?" Whereupon Johnson, with

Johnson a disdainful look, thundered at him: "Why, on *dunces*. It was
on worth while being a dunce then. Ah, Sir, hadst *thou* lived in
Dunces those days! It is not worth while being a dunce now, when
there are no wits." From Pope and his Pastorals, which

Johnson considered "poor things, though the versification was fine," the conversation passed to Dryden. The mention of Congreve provoked an exciting scene between Garrick and Johnson. Johnson said that the description of the temple in "The Mourning Bride" was "the finest poetical passage he had ever read.* He recollected none in Shakespeare equal to it." Boswell says that Garrick, all alarmed for "the God of his idolatry," interposed with the remark, "we know not the extent and variety of his powers. We are to suppose that there are such passages in his works. Shakespeare must not suffer from the badness of our memories." Johnson, diverted by this enthusiastic jealousy, went on with great ardour: "No, Sir; Congreve has *nature*" (smiling on the tragic eagerness of Garrick). Composing himself, he added: "Sir, this is not comparing Congreve on the whole with Shakespeare on the whole; but only maintaining that Congreve has one finer passage than any that can be found in Shakespeare. Sir, a man may have no more than ten guineas in the world, but he may have those ten guineas in one piece; and so may have a finer piece than a man who has ten thousand pounds: but, then, he has only one ten guinea piece." The other members of the company managed to get a word in edgewise in the after-dinner conversation, but



SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

* "The Mourning Bride," 1697, is Congreve's only tragedy. The passage which Johnson praised so highly is as follows:—

"How reverend is the face of this tall pile,
Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads
To bear aloft its arch'd and ponderous roof,
By its own weight made steadfast and immovable
Looking tranquility! It strikes an awe
And terror on my aching sight."

Garrick was the only one who could stand up to the Oracle. The actor loved to provoke his old friend, and was always quietly poking fun at him and leading him on. Speaking of an essay on Shakespeare written by a lady,* Sir Joshua Reynolds observed: "I think that essay does her honour." To which Johnson replied: "Yes, Sir, it does *her* honour, but it would do no one else honour. I have, indeed, not read it all. But when I take up the end of a web and find it pack-thread, I do not expect, by looking further, to find embroidery. Sir, I will venture to say, there's not one sentence of true criticism in her book." Garrick thought that, at least, it showed how much Voltaire had mistaken Shakespeare, which nobody else had done. "Sir," said Dr. Johnson, "nobody else has thought it worth while. And what merit is there in that? You may as well praise a schoolmaster for whipping a boy who has construed ill. No, Sir, there's no real criticism in it: none showing the beauty of thought, as formed on the workings of the human heart." It



SIR WALTER SCOTT

was not possible for the evening to pass without some allusions to the Scotch. Praising the literary method of a certain writer whom he dubbed "The Scotchman," Johnson concluded with his opinion of the ballad of "Hardyknute," a "modern antique," which was supposed to have been written by Elizabeth Halket, afterwards Lady Wardlaw. She was also the reputed authoress of "Sir Patrick Spens" and other ballads. "Hardyknute" was published in 1719. "The ballad," said Johnson, "has no great merit, if it be really ancient. People talk of nature. But mere obvious nature may be exhibited with very little power of mind."†

Samuel Johnson has a fascinating influence over the London life of his day, a topic from which it is difficult to drag oneself away. Fleet Street was his haunt. It was a fortunate circumstance that he came to Boswell's dinner

in Bond Street, for his visit discloses to us a glimpse of Johnson in the west end which is as rare as it is interesting.‡ On the other hand, a great literary

* Mrs. Montagu (1720-1880), wife of Edward Montagu, grandson of the first Earl of Sandwich, the famous "blue stocking" and Society lady. She built Montagu House, Portman Square. Her "Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear," in which she attacked Voltaire, was published in 1769.

†A picture of Boswell's lodgings in Bond Street, a fancy scene, with portraits of the celebrities at the dinner, was painted by W. P. Frith, whose "Derby Day," "The Railway Station," and "The Road to Ruin," brought him so much celebrity. His "Before Dinner at Boswell's Lodgings," painted in 1868, was sold at Christie's in 1875, for £4,567, a larger sum than had ever before been paid for a picture by an English artist during the lifetime of the painter.

‡ Boswell lived but little amid the well-known haunts and habitations of Johnson. His fancy inclined more to Mayfair. He prided himself upon the excellence of his dinners. In 1768, he had lodgings in Half Moon Street, Piccadilly. On May 14th, he wrote from there: "I am really *the great man now* . . . I give admirable dinners and good claret." The "Life" was written in Queen Anne Street, Cavendish Square.

man of a later age, the poet Byron, was associated with the London life of St. James's Street and Piccadilly, and knew not the habitations of Johnson.

**Byron
and
Scott**

Byron also knew Jermyn Street, Bennet Street, the Albany, and Albemarle Street well. He frequently passed through Bond Street on his way from the Albany to the home of his publisher, Mr. Murray, in Albemarle Street. Moore, in his life of Lord Byron, tells us that when, in 1811, at the house of Samuel Rogers, No. 22, St. James's Place, Piccadilly, he first met Byron, he was impressed by "the nobleness of his air, his beauty, the gentleness of his voice and manners and—what was naturally not the least attraction—his marked kindness to myself. Being in mourning for his mother, the colour, as well as his dress, of, his glossy, curling, and picturesque hair gave more effect to the pure, spiritual paleness of his features, in the expression of which, when he spoke, there was a perpetual play of lively thought, though melancholy was their habitual character when in repose."

Sir Walter Scott met Lord Byron in the spring of 1815. "Report," he wrote to Moore, after Byron's death, "had prepared me to meet a man of peculiar habits and quick temper; and I had some doubts whether we were likely to suit each other in society. I was most agreeably disappointed in this respect. I found Lord Byron in the highest degree courteous and ever kind. We met for an hour or two almost daily in Mr. Murray's drawing-room, and found a great deal to say to each other." It was in Bond Street that Scott and Byron saw each other, in 1815, for the last time, after Sir Walter returned from France: "He dined, or lunched, with me at Long's, in Bond Street. I never saw him so full of gayety or good-humour, to which the presence of Mr. Mathews,



CHARLES MATHEWS

the comedian, added not a little. After one of the gayest parties I was ever present at, I set off for Scotland, and I never saw Lord Byron again." A few months later, and Byron had left England for ever.

"Mr. Mathews, the comedian," whose presence added not a little to the gaiety of the last meeting between Byron and Scott, was the elder Mathews, Charles, who, in 1815, was at the height of his fame. He was on a friendly footing, not only with members of his own calling, but with Coleridge and Charles Lamb. Leigh Hunt, Horace Smith, and Byron had the greatest admiration for him. Born in 1776, he died in 1835. His son, Charles James (1803-1878), a light comedian of the highest order, married, in 1838, the famous actress, Lucia Elizabeth Vestris. Their son, Sir Charles Willie Mathews, born in 1850, is the Director of Public Prosecutions of our day.

The annals of Bond Street take in the names of many other celebrities—Swift, Johnson's friend, Bennet Langton, and Lady Hamilton among the

number. But they belong to New Bond Street. Sir Thomas Lawrence, however, lived at No. 24, Old Bond Street, before his election to the Royal Academy, in 1791, and at No. 29,



SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE

after his election. Ozias Humphrey, the miniature painter, resided, in 1796, at No. 13. Nelson knew the neighbourhood of Piccadilly better than that of any other part of London. It was at Nerot's Hotel, in King Street, St. James's, that he separated from Lady Nelson, in the winter of 1800-1801. Some years before that, he was lodging in New Bond Street, at No. 141. This was in 1797, after the battle of Cape St. Vincent, and the expedition against Teneriffe, in which he lost his right arm. His flag was hauled down at Spithead on September 3rd. He immediately joined his wife and father at Bath, subsequently coming to London to be invested with the Order of the Bath by George III. The wound to his arm caused him intense suffering. At his earnest request, says Southey, Lady Nelson "attended the dressing until she had acquired sufficient resolution and skill to dress it her- self. One night, during this state of suffering, after a day of constant pain, Nelson retired early to bed, in hope of enjoying some respite by means of laudanum. He was at that time lodging in Bond Street; and the family was soon disturbed by a mob knocking loudly and violently at the door. The news of Duncan's Victory* had been made public, and the house was not illuminated. But when the mob were told that Admiral Nelson lay there in bed, badly wounded, the foremost of them made answer, 'You shall hear no more from us to-night'; and, in fact, the feeling of respect and sympathy was communicated from one to another with such effect, that, under the confusion of such a night, the house was not molested again."

Nelson and the Mob

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LORD NELSON

* Adam, Viscount Duncan (1731-1804), Admiral and Commander-in-Chief in the North Sea, 1795-1801. In 1797, when Nelson was lying ill in Bond Street, Duncan defeated the Dutch Admiral, De Winter, off Camperdown.

Let us retrace our steps to Old Bond Street and note the last of the literary celebrities of the past who lived in this region of romance. At No. 27A, William Harrison Ainsworth resided from 1834 to 1841.

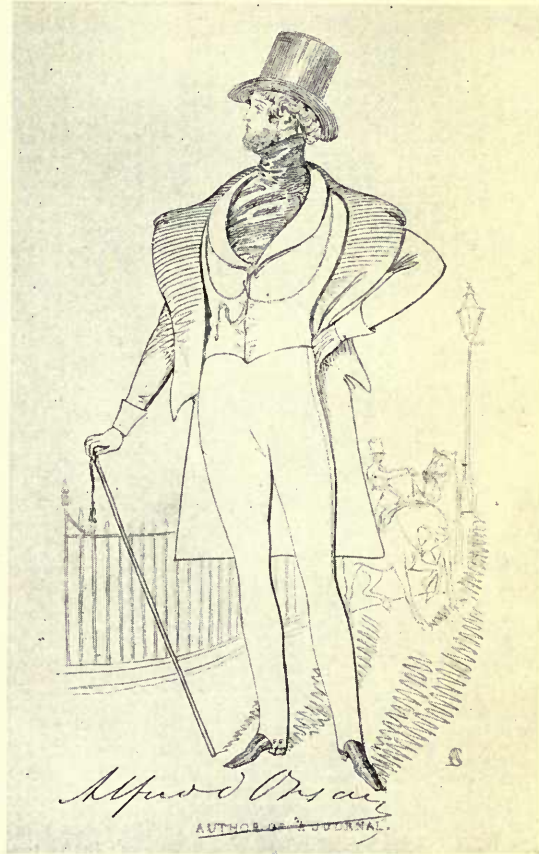
**The Author
of "Jack
Sheppard"**

It was in the first-named year that Ainsworth rose to fame with "Rookwood," which contains the stirring picture of Dick Turpin's Ride to York. In 1839, came "Jack Sheppard," "The Tower of London" followed in the next year. "Guy Fawkes" and "Old St. Paul's" were published in 1841. When Harrison lived in Bond

Street, Lady Blessington was holding her literary assemblies at Gore House, Kensington. The novelist was one of her most assiduous correspondents, many of his letters to her being dated from No. 27A. Marguerite, who afterwards became the wife of the first Earl of Blessington, the daughter of a country gentleman of small means, was born at Knockbril, near Clonmel, in the county of Tipperary, in the year 1789. Her father was of a fiery nature and half-mad. At the age of fourteen and a-half, she was married to a captain in the army, one Farmer, whose sole gift seems to have been a violent temper. She was soon separated from him. Marguerite's second husband was Charles John Gardiner, Earl of Blessington, to whom she was married when she was twenty-eight. He was a man who was "mad with self-will," extravagant, and fond of display. For some eight years, Lord and Lady Blessington travelled on the

Continent, and resided for a considerable time in Italy. They were accompanied by a niece of her ladyship's, and by Count Alfred Guillaume Gabriel D'Orsay, son of General Count D'Orsay, one of the old French *noblesse*.

Now, Alfred was a very plausible fellow, tall and handsome, some ten years younger than the Countess. He first of all fascinated the Earl, who insisted upon his marrying one of his daughters ("he did not care which") by a former marriage. This event occurred at Naples, in 1827.



COUNT D'ORSAY

Two years later, Lord Blessington died in Paris, of apoplexy. Soon afterwards, his widow, and the Count and Countess Alfred, came to London. In 1836, the younger people separated, and Lady Blessington set up house in Kensington. Here, she gathered around her "poets and prose writers, both Tory and Whig, distinguished journalists, **Lady Blessington** *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* reviewers, with actors, artists, travellers, exiles, etc., Landor and Thomas Moore being the leaders among the poets, and Prince Louis Napoleon at the head of the exiles. Every



Maria F. Malleson

*After playing *Fidelma*
in *Compassion's* opera, *Le Matrimonio segreto*
Malleson went into a *Salon*
to see the *Dalib*, a rather to
afford the Public a better opportunity
of appreciating her powers of
transformation*

July 31st 1830.



Published by Mitchell's Library.

celebrated novelist, in particular, naturally made one of a circle, over which presided the charming woman, who was herself a novelist." The ladies were conspicuous by their absence from Gore House, for they looked askance at one roof sheltering the beautiful widow and the Adonis who was so much her junior in years. On his death-bed, the tears pouring down his face, the Count declared that Lady Blessington "was to me as a mother! a dear, dear mother! a true loving mother to me!" Well, it may have been so.

But how, it may be asked, do Lady Blessington and the Count D'Orsay come into this strange, eventful history? The answer is simplicity itself. In the hey-day of their success, they were customers at the earliest of

the Bond Street libraries, and often stopped in their walks abroad to purchase books and stationery, magazines of fashion, and boxes for the opera, at No. 33. If Lady Blessington possessed the brains of the couple—she wrote novels, edited a "Book of Beauty," and, on its foundation, contributed to the *Daily News*—the Count Alfred was the figure-head. "To see D'Orsay coming up a lobby, or a drawing-room, was a sight; his face was so delicate, his figure so manly, and his white waistcoat so ample and august," wrote Leigh Hunt, who "happened once to see him and O'Connell sitting opposite one another, the latter with a waistcoat to match, and" was "at a loss to think which had the finer 'thorax' of the two—the great Irishman, who thundered across the channel, or the magnificent French Adonis, who seemed to ennoble dandyism." In 1831, when Lady Blessington and Count Alfred and his wife were living in May-fair, they had accounts—as did most of the other fashionable people of the time—at the library of John Mitchell. These old accounts are very interesting, throwing, as they do, an instructive light upon bygone times and the useful purposes which the libraries of those days served. Lady Blessington—who had met Byron in Genoa—was an ardent purchaser of his works. On different dates in 1832, she bought at Mitchell's seventeen volumes of Byron's works. Some of her other purchases here are curious. They include Henderson's "Rules for Health," 6s.; Moore's "Dictionary of Quotations," 12s.; the "Law of Husband and Wife," 8s.; and Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy," for 24s. Of her own "Book of Beauty," she bought many copies at a guinea each. Later on, she purchased several copies of her "Conversations with Lord Byron," at 14s. On June 15th, 1832, her ladyship paid £6 6s. for a box at the opera on a benefit night, and, on another occasion, she was debited with the sum of one shilling for "hackney coach fares."

Even more interesting than the account of Lady Blessington is that of the Count D'Orsay. For he appears to have obtained a vast quantity of writing and drawing material from Mitchell's library—ink, note paper of various sorts, drawing pins and pencils, white drawing paper, "whited brown" paper, in unlimited quantities. He was perpetually buying cards, presumably visiting cards, 100 each time. He indulged in many boxes at the opera and at the Adelphi, Astley's, and the Olympic theatres. His first account was £30 odd. He paid £20 off this, and went on gaily again until he owed over £90. What happened after this it is impossible to say. But the debit side of the old library was a very heavy one. Unlimited credit was given, and most people just gave an occasional £20, or £30, as it suited them. Even the son of the first John Mitchell had an account at No. 33 in the year 1832, mostly for books. "John Mitchell, Esq., Junr.," devoured Byron and the early volumes of Lardner's "Cyclopædia" by the dozen. As for ink, blue black, and red, he must have swallowed it. In one year, 1832, his bill for books and ink—and "100 quills. extra best"—was £33 10s. 8d. But he discharged it and started on a fresh round of Byron, Lardner, and ink.

The libraries, as such, disappeared long ago, but the theatre ticket offices of the West-end are spoken of to this day by that old-fashioned appellation. Bond Street has been famous for its libraries for over a hundred years. The libraries not only sold books and engravings. They published them. Moreover, they indulged then, as now, in investing their money in the purchase

of boxes at the opera for re-sale. One of the most noted of those old-time librarians was John Ebers, who was born in London about the year 1785. Early in life, he had a shop at No. 27, Old Bond Street. He is alluded to in the chronicles of the time as "an opulent bookseller." He went into that most dangerous of speculations, the management of Italian opera. For some years, he struggled manfully against disaster, losing in that time £44,080. The end was a heart-breaking affair. One outcome of it was a valuable contribution to the history of Italian opera in this country. In 1828, Ebers published a book "Seven Years of the King's Theatre" (the Italian Opera House in the Haymarket) in which he set out his accounts in justification of himself. It is an instructive book. His business in Old Bond Street—bookseller, stationer, and "opera agent"—was carried on until 1863. Ebers, who was the son of German parents, died in 1830.

The most famous of the old librarians was John Mitchell the first, who was born on April 21, 1806. In his youth, he was employed by William Sams, who was the first to start the system of selling seats in the "libraries." He soon acquired an interest in the business. He continued in St. James's Street until the year 1834, when he moved to new premises, No. 33, Old Bond Street, at the corner of Stafford Street. Two years later, he began, at the Lyceum Theatre, a season of Italian comic opera, under the name of "Opera Buffa." Donizetti's opera, "L'Elisir d'Amore," was given for the first time in England under his direction at the Lyceum on December 10, 1836. To Mitchell belongs the honour of introducing to London, in 1842, Rossini's "Stabat Mater." In that year he became the lessee of the St. James's Theatre, a bold experiment, for the house had a bad record of failure. Mitchell's management lasted for twelve years. During that time he brought to London the best of French players and companies—Déjazet, Frédéric Lemaître, Ravel, Levasseur, and Rachel. In 1853, he introduced a German company to the St. James's. They gave "Faust" and several Shakespearean plays. In that year, also, Mitchell brought the Cologne Choir to England. Mitchell, it is said on the highest authority, "was held in great esteem and friendship by the leaders of the stage and the concert room." He died in London on December 10, 1874, in his 68th year.

Happily for this narrative the present head of the house came to Old Bond Street as a boy. In the early 'seventies, George Ashton, after some experience in a City office, came west, and had the good fortune to make an immediate and unexpected hit—although not quite in the orthodox manner. Much to his surprise, the duty devolved upon him of receiving the Prince of Wales (afterwards Edward VII.) at the Court Theatre. He had no dress suit, and had to borrow the clothes from a friend, who was much taller. The reception passed off fairly well, but when the youthful attendant upon Royalty was backing down the stairs at the end of the play, his fears and the bagginess of his borrowed trousers overcame him, and down he fell, much to the consternation of himself and the amusement of the Prince. A comical introduction, but one that was fortunate, for Mr. Ashton has been in attendance upon Royalty ever since—in short, for nearly half a century. Not only has he been in personal attendance upon the Sovereign at every theatre or place of entertainment during that period, but to him has fallen the responsibility for

the arrangements in connection with every "command" performance at Windsor, Sandringham, and the various theatres visited by King Edward and Queen Alexandra and by their present Majesties.

John Mitchell was succeeded in the business by his nephew, William Stair Mitchell, upon whose death Mr. Ashton left No. 33, and started an establishment of his own at No. 38, taking with him the patronage of the Prince of Wales, with the result that, a few years later, he absorbed the old firm into his own and returned to the office where he had started as a junior clerk. He soon developed the business, and the name of Ashton and Mitchell is as well known now in Liverpool, Manchester, and Leeds—where the firm has branch offices—as in London. By permission of King Edward, given in 1901, Ashton and Mitchell are entitled to use the prefix "Royal" in describing their theatre and concert agency. In 1869, as will be seen from the reproduction of a brass plate, which records the event, the "library" was visited by Queen Victoria.

One of the callers at No. 33 was the great actor-manager of the Lyceum Theatre, Henry Irving, who

Henry Irving looked in on more than one occasion to have a chat with, and maybe, to receive a

word of encouragement from Mr. Ashton. During the most successful period of his career, Irving lived a few yards away, at No. 15A, Grafton Street, at the corner of Bond Street, opposite what used to be Long's Hotel. Just about the time when Mr. Ashton was commencing his career, Henry Irving had made his first step on the ladder of fame. When he took up his abode in the rooms which he occupied for so many years, he had played Digby Grant in "Two Roses," he had thrilled a London audience by his recital of "The Dream of Eugene Aram," and he had electrified the playgoing world by his performance of Mathias in "The Bells." Irving occupied these chambers from 1873 until 1899, when, in search of sun, he moved to Stratton Street. The Grafton Street rooms were somewhat gloomy, but, during his occupation of them, Henry Irving came to the summit of his fame. He was a great thinker, and much of his work for the stage was accomplished in this corner house. Here he entertained his personal friends, not only with a lavishness which sometimes ran to extremes, but with, more valuable than mere generosity, a consideration which made him a prince among his fellows. Here he came after his great triumphs. Here he lived his lonely life: here he received the knighthood by which his calling was honoured.



SIR HENRY IRVING

BOND STREET

1831

Dear Street!—where at a certain hour
Man's follies bud forth into flower!
Where the gay minor sighs for fashion;
Where majors live that minors cash on;
Where each who wills may suit his wish,
Here choose a Guido—there his fish:—
Or where, if woman's love beguiles,
The ugliest dog is sure of smiles.

LORD LYTTON : *The Siamese Twins.*

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